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ABSTRACT

This symposium is comprised of three papers on issues of gender in human resource development (HRD). "The Impact of Awareness and Action on the Implementation of a Women's Network" (Laura L. Bierema) reports on research to examine how gender consciousness emerges through the formation of in-company networks to promote corporate women's status. It finds that many corporate women are aware of the obstacles their gender presents to advancement, yet they are unable to raise their voices or take action addressing such problems due to fear or denial. "The Process of Women's Gender Consciousness Development" (Laura L. Bierema) explores women's gender consciousness development and finds it is impacted by these three key dynamics: identity development through learning "the hidden curriculum" that teaches girls and women subordination to the dominant patriarchal system of power; becoming aware of gender power relations, critiquing them, and ultimately rejecting them; and taking connected action to change gendered power relations. "Gender, Power, and Office Politics" (Ya-Hui Lien) explores the experiences of Taiwanese female clerical workers and how they deal with office politics. (These three major themes emerged about their powerless experiences: powerlessness and frustration result from the structural barriers, powerlessness and frustration result from the behavioral barriers, and powerlessness and frustrations require accommodation and rationalization.) The second and third paper include substantial references. (YLB)

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2002 AHRD Conference

Issues of Gender

Symposium 7

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The Impact of Awareness and Action On the Implementation of a Women's Network

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This case study investigated the process and results of a corporate women's network charged with improving women's standing in the organization. The network ultimately failed. This research explores women's concerns and level of gender awareness as related to the women's network initiative.

Keywords: Women's Networks, Gender Consciousness, Human Resource Development

Exploring knowledge creation about gender in the workplace is important since women make up approximately 50 percent of the workforce and are slowly moving into positions of power. There are many pleas for research on women in work context, but few published studies. Caffarella & Olson (1993) call for more data-based studies to develop the ideas, concepts, models, and theories about women's development. They ask: "How would raising the consciousness of women about the 'glass ceiling' for women in organizations affect their life dreams and what they believe they can achieve?" (p.145). This is an important question since women have been found to exhibit low levels of gender awareness when reflecting on their career experiences in previous studies (Bierema, 1996, 1999, 2001; Caffarella, Clark and Ingram, 1997). The story of this research project illustrates the problems not only for women in corporations, but in studying women's experiences in these contexts.

The purpose of this research was to examine how gender consciousness emerges through the formation of in-company networks to promote women's status. I have privileged access to a group of executive women in a *Fortune 500* consumer products company. This group created a Women's Network (Network) with the support of the CEO that was dedicated to advancing women in the organization. I have worked as an external consultant with this group since 1998 when the Network was formed. Since that time the organization has weathered unprecedented change and uncertainty. One year into the project the long term CEO retired, a new CEO was appointed, the headquarters was moved across the country, many people were laid of as a result of the move, and the company experienced poor stock performance. The organization has been through a downsizing and the Network fizzled out.

The theoretical frames underlying this study fall into three areas: Women's career development, learning, and feminist research. Career development literature sheds some light on how adults progress through their careers, but it has been criticized for basing models on men's careers, and being insensitive to the multiple roles and responsibilities of women across the life span. The second area is a learning frame, which serves to evaluate and understand how women learn about gender in the work context with particular focus on the role of reflection, reflective practice and action, and transformative learning. Finally, this research was approached from a feminist perspective in that the goal was to create knowledge for women that might begin eroding the patriarchal nature of most organizations.

Methodology

The participants were members of the Women's Network that was made up of approximately ten of the top executive women in the organization. The number fluctuated as membership changed over the course of the study. The Network began meeting in 1998 when a focus group was held to initiate the Network. And evaluate recruitment and retention issues specific to women in the company. This group named itself the "Women's Network" and established its mission to: "Provide a focus for ongoing leadership, advocacy, and support for the development of women and minorities and to ensure workplace equality remains a vital part of the [company] corporate strategic plan" (Women's Network notes 6-17-98). The Network met again in January 1999 and refined its mission to focus on the recruitment, development, and retention of women. The last meeting of the group was in 2000.

Data were initially gathered via the focus group. After the group had been operational for over one year interviews were held. Interviews were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim when permitted by the participants. The interview was separated into two parts: 1) reflections on the network, and 2) reflections on their career experiences and learning. The topic of the Women's Network caused a great deal of trepidation and reluctance to speak about it on tape. One of the executives did not want to be tape recorded whatsoever on either topic. Two of them spoke about the network without being recorded, but allowed recording to proceed when discussing their own

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careers. Participant observation was also used as a data collection method at all meetings of the Women's Network. Data were analyzed according to the constant comparative method. This study is limited by its purposeful sample of the Women's Network. The findings are not necessarily generalizable to all women or women's groups. Additionally, I bring my experiences as a woman in corporate context, as well as my positionality as a white, middle class, heterosexual researcher to the research.

Findings

The findings have been organized according to the Concerns Based Adoption Model (Hall and Hord, 1984) and a Gender Consciousness Continuum (Brody, Fuller, Gosetti, Moscato, Nagel, Pace, and Schmuck, 2000). The findings will be presented in the frameworks of these two models and then discussed according to a model of awareness and action derived from the data analysis.

Stages of Concern

The Stages of Concern model was proposed by Hall and Hord (1984) as a tool for assessing the personal side of change. The model was developed using a concerns based approach and conceptual framework known as the Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM). The model assumes that effective change implementation requires that individuals successfully address their concerns. The change or innovation in question in this study was participation in the Women's Network. The CBAM model was selected since it provided a consistent progression on which to evaluate the adoption of the network, and it speaks directly to how individuals experience innovation and change. The model clusters six concerns into three hierarchical levels of adopting change including: unrelated (awareness), task (information, personal, management), and impact (consequences, refocusing).

0. Awareness. All of the network members were obviously aware of the Women's Network. There was little awareness however, about the network among other members of the corporation, which caused significant anxiety among the members.

1. Informational. This stage of concern assumes a general awareness of the innovation and interest in learning more detail, without much concern about how the innovation will impact the individual. Initially, participants felt that increasing awareness about women's experience in the organization was important and the "right thing to do," and that it renewed the spirit of the women in the corporation. Although the Network's existence increased awareness in the organization, many observed that "awareness was clearly not enough." Another participant explained, "I've noticed-I don't know if its just the political atmosphere here, or maybe its a feeling that it's the right thing to do, and especially as a woman I'm not going to say, 'I'm opposed to helping women in my company.'" She continues, "I like to see women advance; I'd also like to see qualified men be advanced."

2. Personal. Personal concerns arise when the individual becomes uncertain about the demands of the innovation, her inadequacy to meet those demands, and her role with the innovation. Personal concerns were the most significant ones participants raised about the Women's Network. Concerns fell into three general categories including corporate structure and culture, network agenda, and differing perceived needs.

Corporate Structure and Culture. The corporate structure was highly decentralized and the organization was experiencing significant changes. The network was in an infancy stage when the drastic corporate changes began and it was difficult to recover from the distractions. There was also a high degree of suspicion of the Network in this male-dominated corporation. One participant complained, "When you hear by way of the grapevine, that there are suspicions held by certain men at the operating companies as to 'well what are these women doing?' Or, where you have some of the women on the network who have so assimilated a male way of working that they do not necessarily see the value in a women's organization. So I think given those different sorts of perspectives it was difficult to establish an agenda for change that one could have a commitment to."

Every participant in this study cited the culture as a key barrier to the Network having impact. The nature of the business is male-dominated with product lines in liquor, plumbing and recreational sport goods. One participant explained the delicacy of supporting a Network in this context, "Women, whatever their level are feeling like you know, I don't know if I exactly if I want to stand up and be counted on women's issues when my organization is primarily run by and features men or products most likely used by men."

Network Agenda. The Network claimed it lacked clarity on the purpose and mission of the group, which was intensified by a belief that management support was wanting. Although the group felt this way, the group received moral and financial support from the CEO who retired and general support from the new CEO. One participant noted, "What role does it play and how does it move things forward has never been answered. I don't really know where the support is or what it's perceived to be doing anymore." Another lamented, "It failed to have an agenda or

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change that was meaningful." One participant suggested that, "The group itself could not define its function, its role, and I don't think we could get any consensus on that [because] everybody is struggling at different levels with different needs and different agendas and without kind of a guiding principle." Some sensed that the group was "going through the motions" and "kind of petered-out."

Differing Perceived Needs. The group could not agree on an agenda and was also stifled by some women who did not see the need for such a Network. This problem was illustrated by one participant, "I think that was part of the issues with the women's network is that when you have some women sitting in there who are saying, "oh we don't have a problem at all around gender issues or any diversity issues at all, and they don't have any women in a position higher than a manager, then you know, there's something wrong there." At times the Network meetings resembled strategic planning sessions rather than opportunities for women to network and support each other. Some members shared their frustrations during interviews that the group did not provide a reflective space for its members and also expressed dismay at the women who felt they had no need for the assistance of a Women's Network. During the interviews Network members opened up and engaged in a more critical analysis of the Network's focus. One explained, "I don't think we addressed enough of how the Network could have been a self-help group for its members." Another participant shared, "It scares me when I sit in a room of women and I listen to women tell me that, 'you know, I never really needed this stuff." Another noted that it was difficult to sit in a meeting, "when you look at the executive that sits there and says, 'oh we have no problems at all.'" In many ways there was an unspoken assumption that nothing would happen as a result of the network.

3. Management. Management concerns tend to focus on the processes and tasks of using the innovation and the best use of information and resources. Similar to personal concerns, management was a significant area of unease for the Women's Network. The concerns fell under leadership, purpose, and unimpressive results.

Leadership. There was a strong conviction that leadership was lacking both from upper management and within the group. It was noted that the initiative needed a corporate sponsor so its reception would move beyond "grudging compliance." Leadership was also a concern within the network. Quotes like, "I don't think most of the women that were involved in the group aren't going to be prone to being lead anyhow," or "I think leadership with the group would be the only barrier except when people are willing to do something" were common during the interviews.

Purpose. The lack of vision and mission could also be considered a management concern, since creating one is an administrative task. One participant describes her frustration: "Well, I'll be honest, I really don't understand its point. I don't know what the mission is of it anymore...I don't feel as if we have a direction that we're going in. I don't feel as if there's leadership to it."

Unimpressive Results. Finally, there was a sense that the efforts were perfunctory in that the potential of the group had not been tapped. The leader of the Network observed, "My perception on it is that it's a good first effort yet I'm disappointed because it hasn't evolved into much of anything." Generally the group felt it had taken a step in the right direction but failed to have any impact.

4. Consequence. Concerns in this category focus on the impact of the innovation on the women's immediate sphere of influence. Three concerns that emerged include those related to identity, voice and energy.

Identity. Since the inception of the women's network there have been grave concerns about how the group's existence would be perceived by the men in the organization. The women were extremely reluctant to identify with the Network. One member observes, "I know jokingly that people in the company say if we have a women's network we should have a men's network then too. Well, go ahead. Knock yourselves out." Identity issues also surfaced for Network members who feared being perceived as "needing help" or "bashing men." One participant noted, "I don't need any help, but appreciate the networking." Another mused, "I think even the women in the group sort of share that perception and no one wants to be thought of as someone who needs extra help. And, I don't think any of the women in that group need extra help." Another observed, "I just think there's an undercurrent of feeling that you don't want to be thought of getting advancement or getting something special by virtue of either your gender or your race." The women did not want to stand out based on their participation: "I don't want to be the only one beating the drum, even though I do think all those things are important." One participant explained, "There's this perception that you're trying to advance people by virtue of their gender and that's wrong because, what about men?"

Voice. The women also described concern about voicing their disagreement with policies and issues related to women. One executive reflected on being silent because the cost of speaking up was too high. Another shared, "Sometimes I've had to accept less than what I thought may have been right and I don't mean that in terms of money necessarily, although that may be part of it." She further observes that it is a necessity at times to be political which she finds difficult since she tends to be direct. To counter her style she explains, "Sometimes you just have to

bite your tongue and not say anything I guess. Look the other way when certain things are being done that you don't agree with. It's kind of scary." She was worried about being viewed as "too strong for a woman."
There was great reluctance to raise voices either individually or collectively to advocate on behalf of women. The consequences were viewed as too negative.

Energy. The women also described a lack of energy as responsible for the lackluster performance of the women's network. After fighting other battles they simply did not have the energy to push one more issue. "I still have a lot of passion about a lot of different issues...All the ism... racism, sexism, genderism, you know I don't like bullyism, I don't like any of those things, and I will fight them till the death, probably until my death." She continues to say her passion hasn't changed, "but I guess what has changed is maybe my energy level." The women cited not only the culture but also themselves as to blame for not moving the work of the Women's Network forward. One executive noted, "The people themselves, the women themselves, don't feel like they have time, don't feel like they have the background, don't feel like. . . pick something, therefore they couldn't possibly stand up and be counted on this."

5. Collaboration. This concern is preoccupied with aspects of coordination and cooperation with others regarding use of the innovation. The concerns at this level were very few, since the innovation of the women's network was not embraced to the level where it had impact beyond concerns about the individual career consequences. The participants who looked ahead to collaborating to make the Network more successful also exhibited a high level of gender awareness and willingness to take action on behalf of the network.

6. Refocusing. This concern stage explores potential universal benefits from the innovation, including the possibility of major changes or replacement with a more powerful alternative. Since the innovation had little impact in the organization, and ultimately failed, the instances of refocusing were few, but expressed by two of the participants.

Gender Consciousness Continuum

The second framework for understanding the data was to transpose it on a modification of Brody, Fuller, Gosetti, Moscato, Nagel, Pace, and Schmuck's (2000) continuum of gender consciousness and privilege. This study sought to understand how executive women develop gender awareness while experiencing the creation and maintenance of a women's network. As Brody et al. (2000) observe, "Society has a collective gender consciousness [or unconsciousness] and unidentified and unspoken assumptions about male privilege" (p. 1). Their study examined how collective consciousness permeates the experiences of both educators and students in both single sex and coed institutions.

Based on the work by Brody et al (2000), I devised a continuum of gender consciousness in organizations. "Gender consciousness refers to a person's readiness to recognize how sex differences and privilege are deeply embedded in the assumptions, expectations, practices, and manifestations of the society. Such a recognition is necessary to authentically teach students to openly examine and respond to issues of unearned privilege in order to achieve equity" (Brody et al, 2000, p. 26). A modified continuum appears in Table 1.

Position 0: Gender "Unconscious" Thoughts and Behavior. This position includes unquestioning acceptance of social assumptions and stereotypes for females and males on the basis of sex. Organizations operating at this point on the continuum intentionally or unintentionally implement different standards, policies, and behavioral consequences for females and males. Position Zero sentiments were captured in the quotes like this woman indicating she did not need extra help: "From my chair looking forward it's not as though I need the corporation to really help me much, assuming that my bosses all stay the same." Another was asked how she felt being a women affected her career. She replied, "I really don't think it has at all. I never have." Yet, she also indicated that, "I'm very used to being the only woman in the room. Definitely doesn't hurt me. And I don't really think it's helped me either." The participants generally blanched at the idea of identifying with feminists and when asked exclaimed, "Oh boy, I don't think so [consider myself a feminist], because I don't think I've been very vocal in supporting women, or women's rights. I probably haven't had to." Position Zero is characterized by strong identification with the dominant patriarchal organizational culture and a lack of recognition or awareness of its power and influence. Gender unconsciousness tends to be characterized by deference to the patriarchal culture. One member had a boss who told her she had to use her married name, and he didn't like her wearing pants. When I asked what she did in that situation she replied, "I used my married name and I stopped wearing pants."

Position 1: Sex Equity. Individuals and organizations at this position recognize that females and males are treated differently because of their sex, and they may make some corrective actions based on this recognition and advocate equitable treatment for women and men. Equal treatment is advocated, but it is not evaluated to determine whether equal treatment leads to equal outcomes. Identity is still tied to fitting in and not upsetting the men.

Position one thoughts and behaviors also include a reluctance to participate in activities that benefit women more than men. One participant noted that although the Network seemed the "right thing to do," she would "like to see women advance; I'd also like to see qualified men be advanced." The women also uncritically modified their behavior and tolerated inequitable treatment as noted by this woman, "As I've worked with higher levels of management I've had to watch my style. I've always tended to be kind of enthusiastic...animated...I've had to learn to tone that down so I'm not seen as flightly, because I'm a woman." She further explained, "I'm not sure I'm really happy about that kind of thing, but that seems to be what's needed. You do it."

Table 1. *Gender Consciousness Continuum*

Position 0: Gender "Unconscious" Thoughts and Behavior	Position 1: Sex Equity	Position 2: Gender Consciousness	Position 3: Critical Transformation
Individuals operating at this point on the continuum unquestioningly accept social assumptions and stereotypes for females and males on the basis of sex. Disparate treatment is accepted as the status quo. Such individuals believe treating people the same is treating them equitably. Men and women might be viewed as "genderless." Career success or failure is viewed as entirely up to the competence and tenacity of the individual. Women accept that they must work harder than men to get ahead. Women will also deny that being female has any affect whatsoever on their career experience. Often women attribute their career success to luck. Organizations operating at this point on the continuum intentionally or unintentionally implement different standards, policies, and behavioral consequences for females and males. Examples might include different pay scales, promotional opportunities and gendered treatment (harassment).	Individuals recognize females and males are treated differently because of their sex. Individuals may make some corrective actions based on this recognition and advocate equitable treatment for women and men. They do not question, however, whether equal treatment leads to equal outcomes. Women do not consider themselves feminists under any circumstances (although they may exhibit feminist values and behaviors). Organizations change standards and policies that differentiate on account of sex and provide deliberate compensatory opportunities to redress past inequities on account of sex.	Individuals recognize same treatment is not always equitable and become aware of gendered power relationships. Individuals recognize that the cultural meanings of being female or male are deeply embedded in everyone's thinking and behavior. Organizations question the assumptions guiding hiring and development. Critical assessment of how policies and procedures privilege certain groups is examined.	Individuals recognize the unspoken assumptions of social privilege , which is determined by valued position in the society. They see that one's sex, social class, and race enable some individuals to have privilege and access to societal rewards, while other do not have the same privilege or access to rewards. Organizations help members question unearned privilege and social dominance in the community and society; the policies move toward understanding multiple perspectives on reality and encourage students to question critically interpretations of world events. Organizations at Position 3 routinely use a critical-theory perspective as an integral part of the curriculum.

There is also a significant reluctance to identify oneself as a feminist at the Sex Equity position on the continuum although the women (in contrast to the gender unconscious) espouse feminist values even if they dislike the word. A participant notes, "I don't think by today's standards I would consider myself a feminist....I think that the world feminist today brings with it some sort of radical element." She further explains that she believes that women should have the right to choose the career they want and be free from discrimination. She finishes with the remark that if her beliefs, "make me a feminist, I am, but I don't think I would use that word to describe myself." Another offers, "I'm a very strong supporter of women. And women's advancement and, I don't know really, what is a feminist? I really don't, I mean, a radical, no. A strong supporter of women, yes, absolutely."
Another explained that although she cared deeply about things affecting women, many of the things she cared about affected both genders and thus "I do not consider myself an avid feminist, I consider myself as a humanist." Only one of the participants identified herself as a feminist. Identity issues were primarily related to how the women would be perceived by others (particularly male colleagues) in the corporation. Women were uncomfortable with being identified with the committee or being regarded as feminists.

Position 2: Gender Consciousness. This position is characterized by an awareness that the same treatment of women and men is not always equitable. There is also an awareness of gendered power relationships and that the cultural meanings of being female or male are deeply embedded in everyone's thinking and behavior. This position is also typified by questioning assumptions about the treatment of women and men. One participant explains,

> Well to be perfectly frank, which I am, [gender discrimination] is certainly an issue here. Women are not viewed in the same way and so how you approach a problem, how you approach responding to an issue.

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You're very conscious of – I'm very conscious of. But it would be different if it was a guy. It's awkward. It's real.

The women noted, however, that being "other" also can have it's advantages: "Being the first woman actually, I think, gave me some opportunities that other people didn't have."

Position 3: Critical transformation. This stage involves individuals recognizing the unspoken assumptions of social privilege, which are determined by valued positions in the society (such as whiteness and maleness). This position on the continuum involves viewing that one's sex, social class, and race enables some individuals to have privilege and access to societal rewards, while it marginalizes others causing inequitable access to privileges or rewards. Critical transformation cannot occur, however, without action on inequalities. This action might manifest in questioning unearned privilege and social dominance in the community and society and challenging the policies that prevent understanding multiple perspectives on reality. and encourage employees and leaders to question critically interpretations of world events. Organizations at Position 3 routinely use a critical-theory perspective as an integral part of the management process. There was little evidence that the individuals were at this stage along the continuum.

Discussion

An issue that continues to rear its head in my research is a pattern of women with power who tend toward "gender unconsciousness" in thought and action. These women are accomplished, intelligent and caring. They have worked often to assist others in their careers. Yet, they seem to be wearing blinders when it comes to facing the true nature of the patriarchal organizations in which they dwell. Their words, beliefs and actions suggest that they do not consider how gendered power relations impact their work environment, nor do they take action to challenge or change them. This study begins to offer explanation about the characteristics of the pattern of "unconsciousness."

The findings presented show that the executive women had many concerns about the innovation of the Women's Network. The concerns fell most significantly into the Stages of Concern model's task areas of personal and management and the impact cluster of consequence. Further, the women demonstrated a moderate progression along the gender consciousness continuum, with the majority adopting a "Sex Equity" perspective on gender dynamics and power relations. To a lesser extent the participants demonstrated gender consciousness in private conversations. This section strives to synthesize these findings with a model of how gender awareness impacts action. The model is summarized in Table 2. The table is based on the axes of awareness and action, assessing the degree of each aspect from low to high. The four quadrants will be explained.

Low Action—Low Awareness

This quadrant is characterized by gender unconsciousness about gendered power relations and little or no action to address inequity. Concerns about the Network initiative in this realm are either unrelated or task oriented with concern about information, personal and management issues. There is little critical reflection in this space, and thus little learning about gendered power relations. The learning would be similar to Argyris' (1993) single loop learning. There is no questioning about the structure and culture, and thinking and action serve to reinforce the current power structures. Functioning in this quadrant does not provide an impetus for women to gain perspective or take action. In other words, it reinforces the status quo by default. The women in this study were all aware of the initiative, but some exhibited little awareness of the plight of women in organizations. One participant explained that she once had a boss who " just didn't seem to like women for some reason." When pressed about how she handled the situation she shared, "[I] just rode it out until he was gone. Sometimes it takes a while though. . . . I think I've been pretty lucky that I've been treated fairly in general." I asked her what she meant by fair treatment and she explained, "I've never really been looked at as a woman in the room, and in fact, I forget that I am. I've never been looked at differently than anybody else." This participant relays an instance of receiving ill-treatment based on gender, yet in the same breath explains she's never been treated any "differently than anyone else." Since there is minimal awareness and action, there is no significant learning when operating in this quadrant.

High Action—Low Awareness

This perspective is characterized by some awareness of gendered power relations and high action aimed at improving circumstances for women in the organization. While contradictory on its face, this perspective is quite common among individuals and organizations espousing sex equity along the gender consciousness continuum, and functioning at task levels of concern. This thinking and behavior may manifest in generating actions in a non-

critical sense that only reinforce current power structure such as adding mentoring programs that produce protégés who accept the patriarchal culture unquestioningly. High action may also occur through the development of policies that are gender insensitive such as the unwritten rules about hours of work, which tend to discriminate against women with family responsibilities. Activities in this quadrant also tend to focus on the deficiency of others where problems of women in the organization are viewed as "something I don't have—others do." A non-feminist identification would also fall into this quadrant. Essentially, the Women's Network is a perfect example of an initiative that generated a great deal of action, but fell short in truly raising the awareness beyond sex equity. The women's identity is tied to the male dominated culture and consequently there is little critical reflection on the impact of the culture on women's experience. This group could not get beyond doing something specifically to benefit women. There was too much concern about how it would be perceived by the men. So, several meetings were held, visions were discussed, action plans devised (and abandoned), and money was spent.

Table 2

	ACTION	
AWARENESS	**High Awareness—Low Action** ✓ Private critique of power relations ✓ Sophisticated understanding of gendered power relations ✓ Fear of reprisal for advocating on women's behalf ✓ Public denial that gender matters ✓ Consciousness ✓ Reinforcement of power relations ✓ Issues of identity, voice, and energy are present ✓ Identity is linked to dominant male culture (fitting in) Stages of Concern Task 2. Personal Impact 4 Consequence	**High Action—High Awareness** **"Change Agent"** ✓ Critical activism ✓ Risk taking ✓ Critical transformation stage ✓ This is the only square that truly challenges asymmetrical power relations ✓ =Perspective shifts from self to others Stages of Concern: Impact 5, 6: Collaboration and Refocusing
AWARENESS	**Low Awareness—Low Action** ✓ Gender "unconscious" ✓ Non-critical perspective ✓ No action =no learning Stages of Concern: 0. Unrelated 1, 2, 3. Task (informational , personal, management)	**Low Awareness—High Action** ✓ Equality seeking behavior ✓ Non-critical action on gender issues (mentoring programs, coaching, staffing, gender insensitive practices and culture) ✓ Reinforcement of current power structure ✓ No critical analysis of power relatio ns ✓ Non-feminist identity ✓ Sense that "other women need help" Stages of Concern: 1, 2, 3. Task (informational , personal, management)

High Awareness—Low Action

The majority of the women in this study fell into this quadrant. They were "gender conscious" and privately offered critique of power relations and understood how they were affected by these dynamics. Their inaction was grounded in overwhelming personal and consequence concerns. The problem with thought and behavior in this quadrant is that awareness without action only serves to reinforce existing power relations. A question that remains to be answered is, do these women only share their awareness in private, safe spaces, particularly with other women or those less powerful? They did not share their awareness in group sessions for the most part rather, it was shared in the privacy of a one-on-one interview. Quotes illustrating high awareness and low action follow: "How have I used [my awareness of gendered power relations]? How have I tolerated it? I haven't used it ... that may be the problem! I don't know how have I used it? I don't even know how to answer that." She further explained that having awareness "allows you to kind of get around it...so that people are not looking at you as a woman, but you as a smart person who's trying to advance the company." Another explained, "I don't want to be known as the woman who keeps beating the drum on women's issue, and no one else is beating it." Another reflects, "I've probably had to work harder; put in more hours. Just to kind of maintain an even playing field because you know, as a woman anyway, you don't have a buddy system going...or you don't often have a mentor." Another considers "It took me longer it seemed to get to the same place regardless of the responsibility. And because it is generally, well totally, a male-dominated place, there wasn't very many places you could go to take that issue. Cause that would be a woman just complaining." Women tend to share their awareness in private spheres. Gender consciousness was not talked about in the public meetings of the group. It was only broached from the safety behind closed doors

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High Action—High Awareness

The final quadrant is characterized by high action and awareness. Women in this quadrant function as "Change Agents" who publicly discuss and act toward improving the culture for women in the organization. These women's concerns are more focused on the consequences of failure of the initiative, improving collaboration, and refocusing the Network to be more effective. They functioned according to the gender conscious level on the continuum. This is the only quadrant that truly challenges asymmetrical power relations. The leader of the Network observed, "I started [it]. ...I'm trying to keep it alive, so that's my role creator, champion and sustainer." Another reflects on her role in the organization, "Whether I like it or not, I am still a role model for women....I was one of the first women in the organization ...very conscious in the fact that I was maybe setting an example for women to follow."
This level of action and awareness is accompanied by a shift away from focus on the self to a wider concern about other individuals in the organization. Perhaps this is attributable to the women's confidence in their positions. Unfortunately, the woman who was responsible for instigating the Network recently resigned from the corporation and it is doubtful that any further effort will continue on behalf of women in this corporation.

Contribution to HRD

The dominant discourse on women's networks is that they work, all women should get involved, and organizations should support them (Catalyst). Unfortunately, it is not that simple. To be effective at eroding structural inequality and creating atmospheres that are conducive to women requires that both networks and their organizations function with high awareness and action around issues of gendered power relations. The network study demonstrates that many corporate women are aware of the obstacles their gender presents to advancement, yet they are unable to raise their voices or take action addressing such problems due to fear or denial. The women in the network study were incapacitated by worries over personal and consequence concerns. Their functioning was not in the high awareness and action mode; the only quadrant of the awareness/action matrix that provides leverage toward meaningful organization change for women. Women members of networks and their organizations need to identify strategies and policies that help move toward quadrant four, or a high awareness and action state.

This study has begun to shed light on the complex process of thinking and action as related to gendered power relations in the workplace. While it still is not clear how women progress to gender consciousness and critical action on women's issues in the workplace, it is apparent that patterns of thinking and action exist. There are important identity issues to be resolved since women tend to identify more with the male culture than their femaleness. Leveraging meaningful change for women in male dominated organizations can only happen when individuals and organizations progress along the continuum of gender consciousness to the point of critical transformation of thinking and action and resolve concerns about doing so. Change will only occur when the levels of awareness and action are high and focused on the organizational level.

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The Process of Women's Gender Consciousness Development

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Women's gender consciousness development was explored and found to be impacted by three key dynamics. The first is identity development through learning "the hidden curriculum" that teaches girls and women subordination to the dominant patriarchal system of power. The second is becoming aware of gendered power relations as described above, critiquing them, and ultimately rejecting them. The third dynamic is taking connected action to change gendered power relations.

Keywords: Women's Development, Action Research, Gender Consciousness

Women make up half the human race and over half the U.S. workforce. Despite 50 years of exponential gains in workplace participation women trail men in pay, promotion, benefits and other economic rewards (Bowler, 1999; Elder and Johnson, 1999; Kim, 2000, and Knoke & Ishio, 1998). Women are slowly moving into positions of power, yet their single-digit percentage representation at the top ranks of organizations is grossly disproportionate to their sheer numbers in the workforce. Women who succeed in scaling the corporate ladder often do so by emulating men and reinforcing patriarchal systems that discriminate against women and people of color, one possible explanation for the dearth of women at the top.

Women's learning at work is challenging because it happens in a context that has been largely created, maintained, and controlled by white men. Success for many women often means accepting and even imitating male dominated organizational culture. Yet, this type of acculturation does not help eliminate systemic discrimination or asymmetrical power distribution, nor does it balance gender representation among the ranks of executives. Understanding how knowledge is created about gender in the workplace is important because it helps us understand the dynamics of gendered power relations in organizations. It yields clues as to why women have been relatively unsuccessful in breaking through the "glass ceiling." It also helps us understand how to begin eroding patriarchal systems that serve only to reinforce the status quo.

Women's learning at work must be considered in the broad social context that dictates gender roles, cultural norms, and expected behaviors. Although it is argued that women lack voice, visibility, and power, the question remains: how does their learning at work deal with these disadvantages? Hayes and Flannery (2000) charge that researchers have failed to move beyond mere description of learning, integrate feminist perspectives into their research, or consider how sexism and power relationships impact learning. Further, they observe that research lacks diversity and wide social, economic, and political analysis. They also suggest that women respond to their social contexts as learners and learn different ways of responding to oppression. They wonder, however, if any of these responses are "self-affirming and growth enhancing" (p. 51). There is evidence that many are not. A striking feature of previous studies is that some women exhibited a low level of gender awareness when reflecting on their career experiences (Bierema, 1994; Caffarella, Clark, and Ingram, 1997). Women in these studies reported experiencing gender based hardship, discrimination, and harassment. Yet, often these women did not attribute their experience to gender, even when asked directly. Learning that some of these women broke through the glass ceiling by "playing by the rules," ignoring sexual harassment, tolerating exclusion from the men's network, and accepting less qualified men being promoted over them was startling. Moreover, some of these women continued to follow a non-critical stance toward the patriarchal organization *after* achieving power and success.

Workplaces are social institutions, and thus, mirror the power structures and oppressive forces in society. Organizations are primarily male-dominated and success normally involves emulating the successful (Diekman and Eagly, 2000; Fagenson, 1990; Maniero, 1994). Hayes and Flannery (2000) suggest that like education, the workplace has hidden curricula that reproduce power structures. Evidence of this assertion is found in many studies suggesting that masculine traits help women advance at work. For instance, women at senior hierarchical levels in organizations scored significantly higher on measures of masculinity scales (Fagenson, 1990); feminine personality or physical attributes have been found more essential for success in female-dominated occupations, while masculine personality or physical attributes were thought more essential in male dominated occupations (Cejeka and Eagly, 2000); and women's access to top male-dominated roles depends on their personality, cognitive, and physical

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attributes becoming more like those of men (Diekman & Eagly, 2000). Kolb (1999) found that the sex and personality trait of femininity had no significant effect on leader emergence, but self-confidence, attitude toward leadership, prior leadership experience, and the personality trait of masculinity did. Mainiero (1994) interviewed 55 high-profile executive women about key events in their early careers that led to success. She concluded that fast tracking was dependent upon assignment to a high visibility project, demonstration of high performance, attraction of top-level support, display of entrepreneurial initiative, and accurate identification with company values.

According to these studies, career success is dictated by assuming masculine attributes, stereotyping gender roles, and following a set of "rules" for success. The result of these dynamics is the acculturation of women into male work culture, devaluation of women's gender roles, and deprivation of women's identity. Women's need or desire to buy into the "old boy" network may be explained by either suppression or unawareness of themselves as gendered beings (Bierema, 2001; Caffarella, Clark and Ingram, 1997). Women's uncritical career development not only causes them to adapt to a masculine model, but also prevents them from addressing power differentials or claiming a career on their own terms as women. There are many pleas for research on women in work context, but few published studies. Caffarella & Olson (1993) call for more data-based studies to develop the ideas, concepts, models, and theories about women's development. They ask: "How would raising the consciousness of women about the 'glass ceiling' for women in organizations affect their life dreams and what they believe they can achieve?" (p.145). This study attempts to explore the effects of women's consciousness of gendered power relations.

Theoretical Framework and Purpose of Study

The theoretical frames underlying this study fall into three areas: Women's career development, learning and feminist research. Career development literature sheds some light on how adults progress through their careers, but it has been criticized for basing models on men's careers, and being insensitive to the multiple roles and responsibilities of women across the life span. Thinking about women's career development has been dominated by male-oriented theories that inadequately illuminate women's careers. The second area is a learning frame, which serves to evaluate and understand how women learn about gender in the work context with particular focus on the role of reflection, reflective practice and action, and transformative learning in the women's work context as it relates to gender awareness. Finally, this research was undertaken from a feminist perspective with the goal of creating knowledge that is useful to women as they learn to challenge oppressive social systems. The purpose of this research was to study women's gender consciousness development through action research project with a group of eight women, the majority of who are employed as domestic violence prevention and treatment policy makers and service providers in the Midwest. The action research group functioned to reflect on our learning about gender, use new knowledge generated to take action, and return to the group to share our learning.

Data Collection and Analysis

An action research project was conducted with a group of eight women including myself. This group was purposefully selected based on their evolved awareness of gendered power relations, and their willingness to act to change discriminatory practices affecting both women and minorities. I gained access to this group through a consulting project. We collaborated for one year on a state wide training project before the research began. All participants joined the group voluntarily and were research partners throughout.

Dickens and Watkins (2000) identify involvement and improvement as the two vital objectives of action research. Action science approaches engage people in a process of internal critique of their own thought and action (Putnam, 2000). The action research design was ideal as it lends itself to both generating knowledge and producing action (Park, 2000). This group critiqued their thinking and action about gendered power relations at group meetings were used to both generate and analyze data. I served as the data recorder and initial analyzer, and the group analyzed and critiqued my preliminary findings during meetings. The meetings were held at a quiet bed and breakfast on twenty-seven acres overlooking a brook. The group met in the library and agreed that the setting contributed to creating a sense of ease and helping the group be open and vulnerable during the sessions. All sessions were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim. Data collection began in May of 2000. The group has met four times formally, one time informally, and keeps in touch between meetings.

The data were analyzed according to the constant comparative method and evaluated according to stages of gender consciousness development (Brody, Fuller, Gosetti, Moscato, Nagel, Pace, & Schmuck, 2000) and a Gender Consciousness Action and Awareness Matrix (Bierema, 2001). Member checks have been conducted both during group meetings and through electronic mail communications. Limitations include the purposive sample. Findings are not necessarily generalizable to the population at large. I was also a participant in the action research process,

however, the group was actively involved in both data collection and analysis. I also bring my lenses as a white, middle class, heterosexual female who formerly worked in corporate America to the study.

Findings

Women's gender consciousness development is impacted by three general experiences. The first is identity development through "the hidden curriculum" that teaches girls and women subordination to the dominant patriarchal system of power. Lessons learned from exposure to the "curriculum" include gender roles, a devaluing of women, silence and invisibility, submission to male power, and acceptance of role contradictions (e.g., use feminine wiles to get what you want—but don't be too feminine—while simultaneously playing by the men's rules). Girls and boys, and women and men learn and reinforce these gendered power relations throughout their lives. The rules and roles accompanying gendered power relations are so ingrained in the culture that they are practically invisible, neither questioned nor challenged by most people. These findings are discussed elsewhere and this paper will focus on the next two areas of findings which include gender awareness development and connected action.

Gender Awareness Development

This section addresses how the women in this study became aware of gendered power relations and began unlearning the hidden curriculum. Learning played an important role in helping women question the status quo, which is a key ingredient in fostering consciousness. Learning was grouped into the categories of individual and connected based on the differences in awareness generated by each. The developmental impact of individual and connected learning on gender awareness will also be discussed.

Individual Learning. Individual learning about gendered power relations included formal learning, self-directed learning, experiential learning, reflective learning, affective learning, and transformative learning. Individual learning verified an intuitive sense that the hidden curriculum was not right and helped the women reject socially dictated roles and power relations. Formal learning played an important role in dawning awareness about gendered power relations. Traditional gender roles and stereotypes were taught and reinforced through both formal and informal learning channels as detailed in the previous section. Many of the women were not encouraged to pursue higher education, and in some cases did so without familial support. All of the participants are highly educated college graduates. Several encountered progressive teachers and received exposure to feminist and women's studies in college. They were also voracious readers and cited several works as pivotal in their thinking about themselves as gendered beings.

The women also learned about gendered power relations experientially, particularly through discrimination. An attorney in the group recalls that in her first firm, "some of the partners weren't sure about working with me, they weren't sure that their wives would be happy having this young person with them...[working] until ten or eleven at night, and ordering a pizza." She also continued to receive unglamorous assignments while her male peer was getting better cases. Experiences with racism, homophobia, anti-Semitism, and sexism contributed to the women's experiences of learning about oppression. Childbirth was another pivotal learning experience that ranged from empowerment to exhaustion across this group. Several also had negative birthing experiences where they did not feel listened to by their doctors. Through their learning, the women rejected socially dictated gender roles and began to explore alternatives. They questioned the legitimacy of their "female role" and rejected the socially dictated roles. Although they individually reached a point of rejecting the status quo, acting upon this new viewpoint was generally facilitated by participation in collective learning.

Connected Knowing. Group learning was repeatedly cited as essential to raising awareness. Speaking about the action research process and the camaraderie that developed among the group one participant emphasized, "I'm thirsting for this." Another noted, "I have always learned more from others." Connected knowing was also a necessary ingredient in moving the women toward deeper awareness and was important in at least three ways. First, it provided a safe space for women to compare experiences in depth. Second, it allowed the women to name their oppression and realize that they were not alone in experiencing the damaging effects of patriarchy. Finally, it began to give women the courage to move from awareness to action. One member shares, "I really think its difficult to learn individually, because whether it is through writing or talking personally with individuals, that's how we hear other perspectives...that's how we get the validation." Although connected learning is important, the women belonged to some women's groups that were unsatisfactory to them in advancing their learning about gendered power relations.

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The Developmental Impact of Learning about Gendered Power Relations

Awareness of gendered power relations developed through a transformative learning process that was a combination of individual and connected learning that challenged the "hidden curriculum's" content, values, structures, and rules. Through both individual and collective processing, gender consciousness emerged and expanded based on questioning the hidden curriculum, rejecting the status quo, reclaiming voice, and reframing identity. These four developmental shifts do not happen in isolation of each other. Rather they overlap and influence one another.

Questioning the Hidden Curriculum. Women begin questioning the hidden curriculum in various ways. Group members noticed and objected to the invisibility of women, or discovered and lamented the fact that society defined them through their husbands. Some learned that their income was neither welcome nor valued in their family systems. Yet through their learning they began questioning these dynamics. Often the questioning was prompted through the media by books such as Betty Fredian's, *The Feminine Mystique* or *Ms. Magazine*. Publications such as these were regarded as "defining moments that you can point to." One participant recalled a woman's she belonged to that questioned the status quo. It was a church group called "Women in Religion." This group read *Woman's Spirit Rising*. This member, who eventually became a Unitarian Minister, describes her learning, "It was like my jaw was just dropping open all the time about how women had been excluded from the stories in religion and theology." Later she attended a conference on feminist theology and heard a speaker who was a Catholic critiquing the Catholic Church. She recalls that someone asked her, "Well how can you stay in the Catholic Church with these viewpoints?" And she said, "Nobody ever asked the Pope how he can stay in the Catholic Church with his viewpoints." The idea that women or even herself could form their own ideas was novel to her.

Rejecting the Status Quo. In addition to questioning the way things are, gender consciousness development involves making the decision to reject the status quo regarding gendered roles. One participant moved to a new community shortly after getting married and recalls, "suddenly I didn't have a job...I'll never forget going to the grocery store and realizing that I couldn't even get a card to cash checks without putting my husband's name on it...and that was devastating to me." She decided not to accept being defined by her husband. There was anger about the programmed images of women. One woman notes that people often brush off these messages. She observes, "And you know here's the argument. It's just one ad in a magazine. Or it's just one line in an article. But when you are bombarded with those one little experiences they really add up to reinforce the status quo." As the women questioned and rejected the status quo, they began to reclaim their voices.

Reclaiming Voice. A key learning process that accompanies the rejection of the status quo is the act of reclaiming voice. Participants described not only reclaiming voice for themselves, but also helping others be heard. There was also a fear of not being heard, particularly around gender issues as noted by this member, "My fear is that no one would ask us." Another laments not having voice as "this insidious nature of how women just are silenced and how we are expect to be silenced. And we're conditioned that way over time and language is a huge part of that as I understand it and I've experienced it." She is talking about how language is gender neutral or sexist and how it renders women invisible. She has been an activist to change this invisibility.

Speaking up and being heard takes many forms for these women. Staying silent is far worse than any fear or regret they might have over speaking out since some of them know "that there are times when you can no longer be passive. There are situations when you have to actively speak to overcome or to overturn injustices." One member tells the story of reclaiming her maiden name. "Shortly after going to [a] conference I decided to change my name – I was married at the time – and I took my own birth name back and hyphenated it." This is a brave act required explanation to family, friends and co-workers.

Another member notes how difficult it is to have a voice. She laments, "We're not encouraged to care a lot about certain issues." She notes that sometimes on a professional level the resistance is an impression that "'you're just taking this gender thing too seriously' and I think that's part of the struggle...but there's [this] thing in our culture where we're not encouraged to really care about issues too much, or too seriously, if we are it's like over the top or something." As these women began to challenge gendered power relations their identity began to shift.

Reframing Identity. As women in this study questioned the hidden curriculum and decided to reject the status quo, they began to define themselves as gendered beings. They reframed their identity in a way that brought gendered power relations into the foreground. Awareness is the essence of their being, affecting their career choices, intimate relationships, parenting, and interactions with family, friends and co-workers. Identity development is the result of multiple experiences over time and is defined as how women identify themselves (i.e., as African American, Certified Public Accountant) and measure their self worth (i.e., positive or negative evaluation) (Hayes and Flannery, 2000). Gender awareness happens much the same way as pointed out by this member, "Awareness happens with multiple incidents versus one definitive moment characterized [by] daunting awareness." Another refers to her

gendered awareness as "just a way of being, that I probably incorporated into myself without even thinking about and realizing."

Awareness of gendered power relations permeates the lives of these women. Consciousness is a way of being. Many have chosen careers devoted to women's issues. A participant speaks about her decision making process, "I know for me that my career decisions, my latest career decisions were certainly based on that awareness." Another shares, "My career choice was a result of my awareness of gender issues. But in addition to choosing career to address the issues, what has happened is that as a result of the career I can also address it in other aspects of my life....So the career has resulted in my being able to even talk individually with other people about [gender] issues. And the issues come up as a result of a situation that they are going through in their personal relationships. And it's gone from my awareness, to choosing a career, to the career, to going back to that personal relationship.

This group is proud to call themselves feminists and is more concerned about working against sexism than over what people might think of them. One person captured this sentiment by quoting lyrics from a Neil Young song saying, "it doesn't mean that much to me to mean that much to you." She explains, "I love that line and I can't ever get there, but ... it sort of reminds me of what we are talking about that as long as you are comfortable with yourself, you make your own decisions, you know why. It doesn't matter what those people think unless we let it impact us." Another member considers, "I don't know if I came to activism because of a dawning gender awareness that motivated me...to like start doing activist work or and then my activism like real solidified and deepened my convictions of the feminist, or if it was the other way around." During the group sessions one participant likened her persistence in defending women's issues to a favorite quote, "And then the day came, when the risk of just staying tight in a bud was greater than the risk it took to blossom." She shares that she loves the quote because it "helps me frame that I don't want to be in this place anymore, and it is risky to leave it, but I don't want to be here anymore." She views the process of awareness as "it's like you've gotta get to the point where you don't want to be there anymore." This also describes how the women use their identity to take connected action.

From Connected Knowing To Connected Action

The women experienced important learning leading to gender consciousness through testing their questions and rejecting of the status quo with the support of other women. This type of learning is similar to Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule's (1986) description of connected knowing. New insight, however does not foster social change without action. Awareness without action is futile. A consistent pattern among these women was that their awareness of gendered power relations manifested in feminist activism, on their terms. They strove to make the invisibility of women and women's oppression visible. They worked to protect other women from discrimination and pain. In fact, for this group, gender consciousness is at the heart of their being, a part of who these women are and how they define themselves. They are not without struggle, however, and work to use their awareness to achieve life balance. They also make deliberate decisions to be "consciously unconscious" at times when the personal cost or pain is too high to act on their awareness. Their activism assumes several forms, both overt and "stealth." They also use their knowledge to teach others about gendered power relations and work for change. This section describes the connected action of the women in this study by sharing stories about how they asserted themselves to make the invisible oppression of women visible, adopted a "conscious/unconscious" strategy, and demonstrated consistency between though and action.

Making the Invisible Visible. The women shared stories about speaking up and bringing attention to issues that disenfranchise women. One notes, "I think it should be that gender consciousness is the purpose of saying that 'this is what's happening to women.' It's to bring it to your attention. I think it is important to call people's attention to something." They take risks to address gendered power relations and view themselves as teachers to help others learn about oppression. One considers the judges she works with sharing, "my role is to instruct [and] most of them are male. Taking action in the name of women's oppression involves making the invisibility of women's oppression visible. Discrimination and oppression of women has become such a part of our culture we often don't see it." These women work to teach others about oppression. There was frustration at patriarchal systems that privilege its members to not "see" oppressive forces as explained by this woman, "My point is that, you have those who feel so arrogant or so privileged that they don't ... think it's necessary for them to do it [be aware]." Another notes, "we have all made it [sexism] visible within our lives, but that so many others haven't."

These women describe their willingness to confront others sexist behavior. One participant emphasizes that she takes action "When there's been a violation of a very clearly defined area." Another raised concerns with her son's first grade classroom about fairy tales with very sexist roles. She notes, "Part of what's hard about making the invisible visible, [is] you see it and then you have to decide on how you're gonna deal with it." She notes that it might be easier for a greater part of society to keep oppression invisible because it's so hard to deal with. She shares,

"all these different emotions can tire you out constantly, it's easier not to see it." These women have taken stands in their children's schools, the workplace, volunteer organizations, and churches. One member talks about her church explaining, "I think all the women at my church and the men, are in a totally different place, but they think I'm the crazy feminist, I always speak my mind...it's very, very important to me." Providing reminders and subtle challenges to gendered power relations is viewed as promoting change.

Adopting a "Conscious/Unconscious" Strategy. Most of these women are feminist activists, yet they make conscious decisions at times to adopt a "conscious-unconscious" stance as a strategy for dealing with sexism when the cost of taking action is too high personally or professionally. In essence, "you pick and choose what you are going to do, and be comfortable with that." This dynamic is explained: "You do a little bit at a time, and then you slide back, and then oh shit, to do it again, you start over again. But you can't react to all of them, or you'd be angry and you'd be fighting daily, so, I guess the best metaphor is, 'you pick your battles.'" Sometimes this conscious-unconscious behavior is simply a means of preserving energy or life balance. Another member explains, "There's probably a lot of things that I run into that I just say, it's not worth it, it's just not worth it. I can't fight everything and everybody all day, or I'll be so negatively focused that I can't get anything done." What distinguishes this behavior from gender unconscious behavior is that there is a deliberate choice made not to act, versus ignorance or denial. One member who toned down her activism when her children were small emphasizes, "It wasn't an unconsciousness, that I kind of denied or put it aside. It was a conscious decision of 'I know how society reacts to this type of behavior'...so I stepped back."

Consistency in Thought and Action. What distinguishes these women from the gender "unconscious" is not only their consciousness, but the consistency between thinking and action, or as Argyris termed it, espoused theory and theory-in-use. Typically, Argyris (1993) found many professionals to say one thing and do another. The apparent, yet unrealized inconsistency was viewed by Argyris as a flaw in reasoning and resulted in failures or unexpected outcomes. The women in this study generally did not fit Argyris' pattern when it came to gender issues. The women consistently viewed themselves as activists for women's issues and shared their beliefs. "To me it's critical that [gender consciousness's] definition is [grounded] in activism." To this member "that's part of becoming aware... activism [is] trying to go against the status quo."

Contribution to HRD

This action research project has provided insight into the process of developing gender consciousness. The primary conclusions of this study include that gender consciousness is a result of connected knowing and action, identity development is impacted by gender consciousness, and developing gender consciousness is a transformative learning process.

Connected Knowing and Action Result Dually Foster Gender Consciousness

A key contribution of this research is that is shows the result of connected knowing: connected action. Knowledge about gendered power relations is not enough and must be accompanied by actions if change is to occur. Connection was important to the sustained activism of the women in this study. Many participants noted that it was taxing to be the "lone ranger" because it was too difficult to sustain prolonged activism on behalf of women's issues. Belenky et al. (1986) concluded that connected learning is most effective when members of a group meet over long periods of time know each other well. They define it as learning that is grounded in relationship, reciprocity, and conversation. It is also a means of identifying common ground among learners. Other scholars have argued that fostering a sense of connection is very important for women's development (Giesbrecht, 1998; Gilligan, 1979; MacRae, 1995; Ruddick,1996). Caffarella & Olson (1993) note in their critical review of the literature on the psychosocial development of women that: "What surfaced as central to the developmental growth of women was the web of relationships and connectedness to others" (p.135).

Identity Development is Impacted by Gender Consciousness

Developing consciousness is difficult and does not happen in a systematic or orderly fashion. Many fields have broadly conceptualized the self in terms of multiple identities, with individuals holding perceptions of themselves such as traits and values, attributes, experiences, thoughts and action, physical appearance, demographic features, and dispositions of various sorts (Leonard, Beauvais & Scholl, 1999). Gender is socially constructed and a part of human identity development that is based on life experience. Self identity has been found to be created through participating in work, private life, community, and other social entities. Gender socialization may result in both

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identity development and identity conflict. For instance, women and men may be socialized to fulfill sex role expectations that conflict with their self image, goals, or occupation. MacRae (1995) suggests that women's identity has been conceptualized in terms of formal roles in the paid work arena dominated by male experience while their informal roles, such as relationships and care giving, have been ignored and made invisible. When women try to challenge formal or informal roles, resistance is high and leveled from friends, families and co-workers. The women in this study struggled to forge an identity that contradicted the hidden curriculum of life and work and fought resistance from family, coworkers, and friends. The two African American women spoke more often of developing a strong identity from their families. Yet being a strong feminist evokes resistance and impacts identity development. The women in this research succeeded in withstanding the resistance, and as a result forged a new self-identity, higher self esteem, and ultimately gender awareness. Zane (1999) found that women began to place more importance on their identity as women as their understanding of gender issues increased. Indeed there is significant social pressure to become socialized as females who are unaware and inactive regarding addressing gendered power relations. Learning in groups of other women was crucial in fostering ongoing identity development and a movement toward feminist activism among the women in this research.

Developing Gender Consciousness is a Transformative Learning Process

Developing gender awareness is a process of transformative learning that occurs both individually and collectively. Daloz, Keen, Keen, and Parks (1996) examine the nature of transformative learning that occurs as a person develops a sense of social responsibility and outline four conditions of transformation: presence of the other, reflective discourse, a mentoring community, and opportunities for committed action." Daloz's (2000) conclusion that consciousness is impacted by recognizing one's "otherness" is relevant to this study. "Otherness" is defined as a process of constructively engaging with the political and social consequences of perceiving yourself as "other" (and usually marginalized) from the dominant culture (Daloz, 2000). I suggest that gender consciousness depends on understanding the "otherness" that accompanies being female. The women in this study were relatively secure with themselves as women before they began acting to change gendered power relations. They also came to define their otherness individually through questioning the hidden curriculum and rejecting the status quo. A group was needed, however, to further develop their awareness. Incidentally, failure to regard oneself as "other" may be one explanation for why some senior level women in management see neither gender differences, nor the need to reorganize power relations. The climb up the corporate ladder may have left them insecure in their own identity after years of striving to conform to a male image and ultimately resulted in gender unconsciousness.

Future Research

This study has begun existing the gap in the literature regarding how gender consciousness develops. Few research articles exist documenting this phenomenon. The existing research lacks a systems perspective, and has been conducted in school or political contexts. Gender consciousness development needs to be explored in a variety of contexts such as non-profit, higher education, community groups, corporations, and small business, to name a few. It would also be useful to examine factors that inhibit learning about gendered power relations. There is significant resistance when gendered power relations are challenged and new information for battling resistance would make an important contribution to restructuring gender relations. This study has also underscored the importance of connection and relationship when learning about gender. Although this study has examined the process of gender consciousness development, it would also be useful to explore factors that inhibit learning about gendered power relations in context among both women and men. There is significant resistance when gendered power relations are challenged and new information for battling resistance would make an important contribution to restructuring gender relations. This study has also underscored the importance of connection and relationship when learning about gender. Future research might explore the learning processes associated with connected action of women.

The words of Gloria Steinem, "The first problem for all of us, men and women, is not to learn, but to unlearn," aptly capture the first action women and men need to take in developing their own consciousness about gendered power relations. Perhaps then, steps toward true gender consciousness and connected action can be made.

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Gender, Power, and Office Politics

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This interpretive study explores the experiences of Taiwanese female clerical workers how they deal with the office politics. The hermeneutic phenomenology was used to describe and interpret the participants' experiences. Three major themes were emerged about their powerless experiences: (a) powerlessness and frustration result from the structural barriers, (b) powerlessness and frustration result from the behavioral barriers, and (c) powerlessness and frustrations require accommodation and rationalization.

Keywords: Power, Hermeneutic Phenomenology, International HRD

Although more women have enter the global workforce than ever before, many of these women are over represented in entry-level positions and staff positions (Ammstead, 1994; England & Browne, 1992; Lowe, 1987; U. S. Department of Labour Women's Bureau, 1993). Despite the increased numbers of women holding administrative and professional positions, the vast majority of senior-level positions continue to be held by men. According to Hsieh (1993), Taiwanese female workers have played important roles in each stage of Taiwanese economic development and growth, same as most of countries; women's voices are still missing in the social science research. Nielson (1990) suggested that traditional research methods both render women invisible and remove them from the context of their lives. The hermeneutic phenomenology was used to gain a thorough understanding of the Taiwanese women's experiences in order to contribute to the body of the knowledge of the human resource development discipline and women study.

Problem Statement

Virakul (2000) indicated that ambitious and capable women have always, from time to time, met with work obstacles resulting from their incompatible relationship with powerful men for whatever reasons. In the Human Resource Development (HRD) field, women still need to have strong mind to win over the obstacles in the workplace in order to get career advancement. Although growing number of western companies, especially the American companies, have been declaring themselves "eaqual opportunities employer", Taiwanese women in workplace still underrepresented in positions of power and authority and underpaid compared to their male colleagues across employment sectors and professions (Chang, 1994; Ku, 1998; Lien, 1989). Office politics is essentially about power (Kenig, 2000). Since entry-level clerical works were mostly held by Taiwanese college-graduates and as their first job (DGBAS, 1999), sometimes, their first work experiences further influence later career choice (Ku, 1988; Moore, 1985). This study intend to understand these young college-graduates 'work experiences, especially when they need deal with the gender, power, and office political issues on the daily bases.

Background of the Study

In order to have better understanding of this study, the following sections intend to describe the labor market and business background of Taiwan.

Labor Market in Taiwan. Currently, 46 percent of all Taiwanese workers are women (DGBAS, 1999). However, even though a greater number of women have entered the job market, women are still considered a minority in Taiwan's workplace. Although in recent years, both women and men have increasingly pursued jobs that have traditionally been dominated by the other sex, the job market in Taiwan is still segregated to a great extent (DGBAS, 1999; Taiwan Executive Yuan, 1995; Tsai, 1994). Despite a focus on the country's economic and structural changes, women workers are still employed mainly in clerical, service, and retail sales jobs. In addition, most management positions held by females were distributed among the lower ranks of managers (Hsiu, 1994). Criteria for most clerical jobs in Taiwan can be found in the classified advertising section of daily newspapers, which lists one employment category as being for "female only". This is contrary to classified advertisements in the US, cannot discriminate among employment candidates based on paid careers. The primary job category for college educated women in the white-collar labour market is "professional and related jobs," with 62.43 percent, which includes mostly school

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teachers and health care professionals. The second largest job category for college-educated women is "clerk," with 33.99 percent (DGBAS, 1999), (see Table 1). However, clerical positions in all industries still employ the majority of Taiwanese female workers.

Table 1. *Taiwanese White-collar Workers, by Gender, Occupation, and Educational Level* *Unit-%*

	Females				Males			
	(Sub-Total)	Less than HS	HS	College & above	(Sub-Total)	Less than HS	HS	College & above
Number of workers	2439	546	1028	865	2407	502	807	1099
Percentage	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Government administrator/business manager	2.46	2.01	1.65	3.58	14.42	14.74	13.01	15.38
Professional and Related	35.30	5.68	28.11	62.43	46.65	14.54	39.78	66.52
Clerk/service worker	62.24	92.31	70.24	33.99	38.93	70.72	47.21	18.10

Source: Adapted from "Monthly Bulletin of Manpower Statistics," by DGBAS, May 1999.

Business Environment. Due to Taiwan's dense population, government policies, and economic strategies, small- and mid-sized companies are encouraged to help develop the nation economy. These small- and mid-sized companies form the foundation of Taiwan's job market. There are four typical business organizations in Taiwan: (a) family-owned businesses, which usually are managed by the owner; (b) foreigner-owned businesses, which usually adopt the overseas parent company's policies; (c) corporation with western management style, which usually have clear policies; and (d) government and public owned organizations (Wu, 1995). Many newly graduated female workers enter family-owned businesses as their first step into the workplace. Family-owned organizations are unique and dominate among Taiwanese business styles, especially with regard to small- and mid-sized businesses (Hwang, 1992). The main characteristics of family-owned businesses are their small size and tendency to employ the owner's relatives. The management style of a family-owned business has more focus on authority than does a western business. Because the family-owned business employs relatives and may lack clear work policies, further, the work atmosphere of a family-owned business may rely more on the employer owner's tastes than would a western-style company.

Theoretical Framework

Chinese Cultural Values and Gender-Role Stereotypes

According to Smith (1992), Confucian philosophy is not based on religion, it is rather based on relationships. Harmonious social institutions and collegial behaviour are important to Chinese people. Chinese society historically was authoritarian and patriarchal, traditionally women were confined to activities in a domestic setting. However, different gender have different social roles (Eagly & Mladinic, 1989) are shaped by cultural values. Specifically, social structures underlie beliefs, which presume that women are homemakers and must behave selflessly, while men are workers who must behave with self-assertiveness. To date, even with the large number of women entering the workplace, society still maintains certain expectations for female workers. The Gender Role-Expectations Theory (Higgins, Duxbury, & Lee, 1994) is based on traditional sociocultural role expectations, which prescribe that men take primary responsibility for the bread-winner role, while women assume primary responsibility for the family. This stereotype shapes social expectations for women working outside the home.

Power and Office Politics

Due to the scarce resources and differences among interest groups, power and conflict are central features of organizational life (Hathaway, 1992). Although power has been defined in many ways, one way to describe the power

is "the potential ability of a person of group to exercise control over another person or group" (Moorhead and Griffin, 1998, p.385).

Power and politics are close related. Office politics is essentially about power. Playing politics is about attaining and retaining power. Political behavior, after all, is by definition an informal attempt to protect one's self-interest, meet personal needs, and advance personal goals (Barney & Griffin, 1992; Hellriegel, Slocum, & Woodman, 1995; Pfeiffer, 1981). In office, people usually use power and other resources to control over another people and obtain their preferred outcome. Women in office, due to the position they held, most of time lack of the power officially. Or women in office, due to the scarce resources, they need to use some office political behaviour to gain their preferred goals. These situation happened especially the company has unclear policy. Although office politic is an unavoidable issue, few studies explain the effect of office politics among workers in the workplace. However, "office politics" is a fact of life. Refuse to recognize this fact, and you leave yourself open to victimization (Hathaway, 1992).

Methodology

Since this interpretative study attempts to explore the office work experiences of Taiwanese young college graduates. In-depth interviews and on-site observation were served as the methods of this study. The study used hermeneutic phenomenology as the research methodology through which to understand the inherent phenomena (phenomenology)--the underutilized role of Taiwanese female clerical workers--and to interpret the lived experiences (hermeneutics) of Taiwanese female clerical workers who claimed that they are underutilized and powerless (Hultgren, 1989).

There are nineteen participants who are college-educated females with fewer than five years working experiences and doing office work. In order to get rich and purposeful information, the participants were selected by using snowball technique (Patton, 1990). They expressed their working experiences to reflect the relationship among gender, power, and office politics. Every participant accepts at least two hours in-depth interview along with on-site visit of their workplace to collect the data. Based on the verbatim transcripts, the text was analysis. According to Van Manen (1998), three approaches towards uncovering themes: (a) the holistic or sententious approach, (b) the selective or highlighting approach, and (c) the detailed or line-by-line approach. First of all, above thematic analysis approaches were used interchangeably. Second, a cross-case analysis was examined to discover the common themes.

Findings

Powerless and frustration are the major themes, reflected the participants thoughts. In order to survive on the labour market, these female clerical workers try to assimilate to the climate. Whether they take it or leave it. Three groups of themes are described below: (a) powerlessness and frustration result from structural barriers, (b) powerlessness and frustration result from behavioural barriers, and (c) powerlessness and frustrations require accommodation and rationalization.

Powerlessness and Frustration Result from Structural Barriers

The structural barriers, which lead these young college-educated Taiwanese female clerical workers to feel powerless, include (a) society treats men and women differently, (b) job restrictions exist, and (c) company policies are unclear.

Society Treats Men and Women Differently. According to Reskin and Ross (1992), employers assume that women's primary attachment to their future families limits their efforts at work. Thus, corporations would rather promote male workers than female workers. Therefor, men have more opportunities and power than women have in the workplace.

Orpha said:

> I have a friend who cannot get promoted. She has a good performance record, but just because she is a girl, she cannot get promoted. A man got promoted, even though she was his mentor, and he used to be her subordinate. The boss just told her she should be sorry because she was a girl. Being a girl was a reason for her not being promoted.

Pam said:

> I think it is really painful to be a female worker. In the same situation, if a woman wants to get

promoted, she must try harder than her male counterpart.... The current situation is that when a promotion opportunity opens, the boss will favor promoting a male employee over a female employee. In fact, if the female is to get the chance to be promoted, she must be far superior to her male counterpart. To be honest, there are still different treatments for men and women.

According to Lin (1989), wages and occupations show differences between sexes at the entry level. Her study suggested that sex discrimination in the labor market existed and cannot be rejected in Taiwan. The idea that "men deal with outside work, women deal with domestic work" is still a common concept in Taiwanese society. As a result, different treatment of men and women—discrimination–occurs both consciously and unconsciously in Taiwan.

Jane said:

> [In Taiwan], because men went to military service, they wasted two years, so employers think they should get much more salary than women [to make up for that lost time]. It doesn't matter whether they [men] have work experiences or not. When they enter our company, they get NT 2,000 dollars more than women get. The employers think that way, so what can you say? I also know that not long ago, we still had a regulation, which we called the "single law." It meant that when women got married, they should automatically leave their jobs, because they might ask for marital or maternity leave, and may no longer be young and beautiful enough for a position as a teller. In addition, women may pay more attention to their families than to work, which employers wouldn't like. Because it causes too much trouble, they prefer that women leave work after they get married. That is what we call the "single law."

Grace said:

> My boss is very narrow-minded; he was educated under Japanese rule and influenced by Japanese business, as well. Japanese thinking, which says that men are always superior to women, influenced him and we do a lot of business with Japanese corporations. They are very typical; they all think that "males, as bread winners, should take care of business and women should take care of domestic matters." As a result, women in the business world are always in secondary roles... One of the problems is the thinking of the company's leader. It really affects girls' development in the business world.

Job Restrictions Exist. Some participants reported that Taiwanese businesses are basically sales oriented. There are some restrictions for females getting into the labor market and becoming salespersons in some trade companies. In Taiwan, females are able to find clerical work easier than other work, especially if these women do not have any professional degrees. They may not easily get sales jobs in some industry or trade companies, so this type of job segregation keeps females restricted to clerical job categories. For example, females can easily be placed as sales assistants or management assistants in any industry. Yet, most of the time, there is not enough room for them to become salespersons.

Grace said:

> We have a manger that proposed that we should have two girls do sales jobs, and one of them was I. But our boss turned down this experimental proposal. In fact, our boss thought that it was inappropriate for girls to do sales jobs. He is stubborn; he doesn't want to be responsible for girls' safety if girls are sales people and go outside the city to do business. Actually, I was honoured to be mentioned as one of the girls in this proposal, even though my boss didn't approve that proposal. Anyway, sales are the foundation of a company. I mean, sales people can make money, and directly profit the company. So males as sales persons more easily get promotions than women, whousually do office work. Women may need to work seven years to become a co-leader in a department. Men may just need three or four years, and then they can be co-leaders... My point is, that women are only doing office work; they don't have opportunities to create visible profit for a company. All women can show businesses are reports, not how many products they sell. We have good filing skills, so what? The boss won't see those skills.

Rachel said:

> When you read the newspaper, you find 90 percent of the jobs you can do are secretarial jobs.

So if I go for a secretarial job, it will be easy for me to get it. Other jobs may require some specific major or requirement. I guess a secretarial job is all I can get.

Company Policies are Unclear. Due to the low corporate level of clerical workers, they have restrictions on what they can do at work. They rarely have the power to do things they need to do; they must follow the boss' or supervisors' orders. In Taiwan, since a lot of companies are mid- or small-sized, the hierarchy in management depends on managers, and the age of managers is a factor, which should be considered. Older managers, who are usually influenced by the Japanese management style, are more negative about women and their capabilities to do business (Wilen & Wilen, 1995). In addition, this type of company may lack clear policies to regulate its own bureaucracy. As a result, the participants blamed the institutions instead of their bosses. If you do not know how to play office politics under this kind of ambiguity of company, you will experience powerless more than ever before.

Ingrid said:

> This company has a bad system; I should say, they don't have a good labor policy. I feel that the boss always thinks about himself.... I think a company cannot only follow the boss' decisions, it should be concerned about employees as well. In fact, there is nothing more that we can learn except office polics.

Jane said:

> Actually, working in a local Taiwanese company is not good for me, because a local company cares about employees' seniority more than about their performance. I mean, the employees' promotion opportunities are based on how long they work for a company; the performance is a minor criterion for promotion. In addition, some people care about some other factors, such as your title. It seems that if you have a good title, then you can speak up more. Things like that. However, in a local company, you should not only handle work tasks, but people, too. Doing things well may not guarantee that you will get good feedback.

Powerlessness and Frustration Result from Behavioral Barriers

Some feelings of powerlessness and frustration occurred because these workers faced difficulties with other people, including their bosses and co-workers, about different work expectations. Both employers and employees may have had different thoughts or attitudes about the nature of work. In my study, some themes about powerlessness were the result of bosses' personalities and their attitudes about how to treat their workers and how they perceived these young, college-educated, female workers' jobs.

The boss Won't Let Go One of the complaints related by my participants' experiences was that they didn't have power and autonomy to do their work. They needed to follow orders all the time. Moreover, they needed to ask their bosses' permission for almost every move they made. They needed to rely on their bosses to give them authority to do things; otherwise, all they did was waste time. However, neither the boss nor the department would acknowledge that fact.

Teresa said:

> I am a secretary, so first of all, I do a lot of detail and trivial work. Since the boss won't give me any leeway, my authority is really limited. And the boss asks me to do more than I can handle [because I have too little authority]. Sometimes, there is just no way to do it; that means I cannot get done what he wants, due to the limited power I have. Eventually, if the boss can give me more room to handle things, then I will do things better. Even when I discussed the situation with the boss, he still didn't get it. It just didn't help.

Rachel said:

> I couldn't learn anything at all. My boss didn't give me any authority. He held the power. I worked as a secretary, as a "small office girl." What I did was more lousy work, compared to real and meaningful work.... We were a small export trade company with just four people--two managers and two employees--and it was a family-owned business. I was a secretary and a "small office girl." I just felt unhappy. I learned nothing, and the boss didn't give me any power to do my job.... It is hard to deal with things when you have little power. The power I had was so limited; the work that I did was so little. There was just no way out.

They Exploit Labour Market Freshwomen. Although my participants felt they had the skills and talents to do their

jobs, they also felt that their bosses just took advantage of them. Their bosses did not care how educated they were; they only saw these young, college-educated workers as newcomers in the labour market. The employers thought they were new, lacked work experiences, and knew nothing about the workplace. So, the bosses used these young workers to do labour-intensive work instead of creative work. In addition, the bosses did not need to pay them as much as they paid experienced workers. The bosses even saw themselves as trainers to help these young workers get experiences. These kinds of attitudes made the young workers feel exploited and further feel frustrated.
Ellen said:

> The boss is very smart. He hired me and told me that I didn't have any experience, so he would give me only a certain amount of salary. In his mind, he thought he was using lower pay to hire a college graduate to do more work. I didn't like the way he acted, but I didn't have any work experience, so what could I say? I feel that it is unfair that they exploit new graduates. They give us a small salary because we lack work experience. I just feel that they exploit "labor market freshwomen."

They Do Not Use My Talents. Many of my participants felt that they had the talents to handle a lot of things. Yet, since clerical workers' skills are invisible, their work seemed trivial and "replaceable." These college-educated female clerical workers felt that they could not use what they had learned in college or what they knew to contribute to the workplace. They felt they had great talents, but no one cared.
Florence said:

> I felt that anyone could do this job. Some tasks may need some time to become familiar. Most of these tasks don't need a lot of talent to do them.... To tell you the truth, I didn't feel bad about that, but when people keep questioning me about why I waste my talent doing this kind of job, then I start to think that I am making little use of my talent.

Sharon said:

> Of course, I think that I am "Ta Chi Hsiu Yu" [someone with good capability but little usage]. This is no fun at all. So I keep my eyes open to look around for other opportunities.

The Boss Gives Credit To Others Without Rewarding Me. When the employees feel disrespect and lack appreciation from their bosses, a common feeling is worthlessness and frustration. They see themselves doing things for other people without benefiting themselves. According to Gutek (1988), a secretary is like an "office wife" (p. 232), a person who is not promoted for her own talents and accomplishments. Most of the time, a secretary is tied to her boss' title and promotion ladder. If a secretary helps the boss, makes the boss look good, and the boss gets promoted, then the secretary has a chance to get promoted along with the boss. Sometimes, because management did not acknowledge the secretaries' contributions to the company; only their direct supervisors and bosses knew about their contributions. If their bosses did not give them appropriate feedback, these clerical workers usually felt that nobody recognized what they did. Moreover, they felt that they were invisible and did things without any reward.
Grace said:

> It is worthless. Working for other people without profiting yourself is not really smart. Also, the boss won't appreciate you. The boss even thinks that he can run the business well without you, although I don't think he is right about that.... I think that I work for someone else without profiting myself. That is too painful and frustrating. In addition, the boss doesn't appreciate me.

Deb said:

> I feel they fool me. I feel like I work for people to whom I am not responsible. I don't know where my efforts go. I don't need to put all my efforts into it. It is wasting my time.

Powerlessness and Frustrations Require Accommodation and Rationalization

Even though these workers experienced powerlessness and frustration, they still needed work experiences for their resume. If they could not leave their jobs right away, they coped with their situations by assimilating into the culture or rationalizing to accept what was happening to them.

We find it Easier to Assimilate Into the Environment. One method these workers used to accommodate their powerlessness and frustrations was to assimilate into their organization culture. This strategy may occur either consciously or unconsciously. Regardless, in order to survive in the workplace, assimilation into the environment was

used to accommodate their frustration and powerlessness. Just as Jane said, " I better change myself to suit the environment." On the other hand, if these workers could not stand their situations, they thought about leaving their jobs.

Jane said:

> Changing yourself to suit the environment is easier than changing the environment to suit you. I better change myself to suit the environment.

Deb said:

> I think I was assimilated into our company already.... Sometimes, I felt that there was some "lazy grain" spread in the air of our workplace. Nobody really wants to fight for his or her own rights. Everybody just listens to the boss; whatever he says, we follow. I think I assimilated into the organisational culture unconsciously.

We Need to Accept Our Fate. Since secretaries' work is considered trivial and they lack control over their work, some workers experienced a feeling of " acceptance of fate." They tried to tell themselves to adjust to their current jobs, especially when they needed their current jobs for various reasons. They may have needed to accumulate work experiences, or they could not find better jobs, or they were tired of looking for suitable jobs. According to my observations and conversations with my participants, the ones who experienced powerlessness and expressed acceptance of their fates were more fatalistic, and their attitudes toward life were more passive than that of others.

Florence said:

> Even now, what I am doing is trivial work. I must tell myself to adapt to the situation I face. It seems everyone is like that. Even to a secretary in a big company, the work is as trivial as it is in a small company. The power you have is limited also. My point is, a secretary deals with trivial things and holds limited power, so we should learn to accept our fate. Ha! Ha!

We Need to Accumulate Work Experiences. As I listened to how these workers dealt with powerlessness and frustration, I found that they had one very practical problem. As newcomers to the workplace, they needed to accumulate work experiences. So, even though they faced powerlessness, they still needed to "hang in there" in order to accumulate those experiences. When they experienced powerlessness, sometimes they tried to accommodate their feelings and rationalize with their needs, such as "we need to accumulate work experiences."

Rachel said:

> What can I say? I need to accumulate work experiences. I need to stay here at least one year to accumulate work experiences.

Kandace said:

> I need to accumulate work experiences. They count how long I work for the company by the year, not by the month. That is why I need to stick with a company even if I don't like it. That really wastes my time, but I need to accumulate enough work experiences.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Feelings of powerlessness and frustration are common themes in these workers' daily lives. According to Gherardi (1994), we are "doing gender" in our everyday work lives. For female clerical workers, some tacit norms exist in the organization, and that may explain why females were treated differently. The powerlessness I saw resulted from the limited nature of their powers, the unclear policies of their companies, and the manner in which the bossestreated their employees. There was too much office politics that they needed to observe if they wanted to break through the system. Since the bosses sometimes did not know what was going on, why should these newcomers--who are young college-educated clerical workers--do things differently? However, if they were too eager to change the system, sometimes they would lose even more power and experience more frustration. Listening to and understanding my participants, I accompanied them as they talked about the powerlessness what they faced and their confusion about the next stop in their lives.

This study has implications for both research and practice in human resource development. Listening to their voice can accumulate the knowledge of the female workers' work experiences. To better understand their real life experiences can help us to reflect the concept of the human resource concept especially on female workers. To reveal their experiences can also help both Taiwanese practice and academics have insightful thoughts in female workers in Taiwan. In addition, this study provides opportunities to international human resource development field for

"vicarious experience" (Patton, 2001) in order to contribute to the social construction of knowledge. Further, this study serves a foundation on which to build theory in Taiwan, which is interest to Taiwanese HRD practitioners, researchers, and educators, as well as international HRD researchers.

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